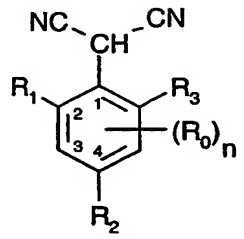
What is claimed is:

1. A process for the preparation of a compound of formula I



(I),

wherein

each R_0, independently of any other(s), is halogen, C_1-C_6alkyl, C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_2-C_6alkynyl, C_1-C_6haloalkyl, cyano-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_2-C_6haloalkenyl, cyano-C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_2-C_6haloalkynyl, cyano-C_2-C_6alkynyl, hydroxy, hydroxy-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy, nitro, amino, C_1-C_6alkylamino, di(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonylamino, C_1-C_6alkylsulfonylamino, C_1-C_6alkylaminosulfonyl, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxycarbonyl-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl-C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_1-C_6alkoxycarbonyl, C_1-C_6alkoxycarbonyl-C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl-C_2-C_6alkynyl, C_1-C_6alkoxycarbonyl-C_2-C_6alkynyl, cyano, carboxy, phenyl or an aromatic ring containing 1 or 2 hetero atoms selected from the group nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur, wherein the latter two aromatic rings may be substituted by C_1-C_3alkyl, C_1-C_3haloalkyl, C_1-C_3alkoxy, C_1-C_3haloalkoxy, halogen, cyano or by nitro; or

R_0, together with the adjacent substituents R_1, R_2 and R_3, forms a saturated or unsaturated C_3-C_6hydrocarbon bridge that may be interrupted by 1 or 2 hetero atoms selected from the group nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur and/or substituted by C_1-C_4alkyl;

R_1, R_2 and R_3 are each independently of the others hydrogen, halogen, C_1-C_6alkyl, C_2-C_6-alkenyl, C_2-C_6alkynyl, C_3-C_6cycloalkyl, C_1-C_6haloalkyl, C_2-C_6haloalkenyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-carbonyl-C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl-C_2-C_6alkenyl, cyano-C_2-C_6alkenyl, nitro-C_2-C_6-alkenyl, C_2-C_6haloalkynyl, C_1-C_6alkoxycarbonyl-C_2-C_6alkynyl, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl-C_2-C_6-alkynyl, cyano-C_2-C_6alkynyl, nitro-C_2-C_6alkynyl, C_3-C_6halocycloalkyl, hydroxy-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkylthio-C_1-C_6alkyl, cyano, C_1-C_4alkylcarbonyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-carbonyl, hydroxy, C_1-C_{10}alkoxy, C_3-C_6alkenyloxy, C_3-C_6alkynyloxy, C_1-C_6haloalkoxy, C_3-C_6-

haloalkenyloxy, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_1-C_6alkoxy, mercapto, C_1-C_6alkylthio, C_1-C_6haloalkylthio, C_1-C_6alkylsulfinyl, C_1-C_6alkylsulfonyl, nitro, amino, C_1-C_6alkylamino, di(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino or phenoxy, wherein the phenyl ring may be substituted by C_1-C_3alkyl, C_1-C_3haloalkyl, C_1-C_3-alkoxy, C_1-C_3haloalkoxy, halogen, cyano or by nitro;

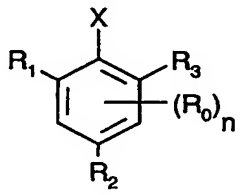
R_2 may additionally be phenyl, naphthyl or a 5- or 6-membered aromatic ring that may contain 1 or 2 hetero atoms selected from the group nitrogen, oxygen and sulfur, wherein the phenyl ring, the naphthyl ring and the 5- or 6-membered aromatic ring may be substituted by halogen, C_3-C_8cycloalkyl, hydroxy, mercapto, amino, cyano, nitro or by formyl; and/or

the phenyl ring, the naphthyl ring and the 5- or 6-membered aromatic ring may be substituted by C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy, hydroxy-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6-alkoxy-C_1-C_6alkoxy, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl, C_1-C_6alkylthio, C_1-C_6alkylsulfinyl, C_1-C_6alkylsulfonyl, mono-C_1-C_6alkylamino, di-C_1-C_6alkylamino, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonylamino, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl-(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino, C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_3-C_6alkenyloxy, hydroxy-C_3-C_6alkenyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_3-C_6alkenyloxy, C_2-C_6alkenylcarbonyl, C_2-C_6alkenylthio, C_2-C_6-alkenylsulfinyl, C_2-C_6alkenylsulfonyl, mono- or di-C_2-C_6alkenylamino, C_1-C_6alkyl(C_3-C_6-alkenyl)amino, C_2-C_6alkenylcarbonylamino, C_2-C_6alkenylcarbonyl(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino, C_2-C_6-alkynyl, C_3-C_6alkynyloxy, hydroxy-C_3-C_6alkynyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_3-C_6alkynyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_4-C_6alkynyloxy, C_2-C_6alkynylcarbonyl, C_2-C_6alkynylthio, C_2-C_6alkynylsulfinyl, C_2-C_6alkynyl-sulfonyl, mono- or di-C_3-C_6alkynylamino, C_1-C_6alkyl(C_3-C_6alkynyl)amino, C_2-C_6alkynyl-carbonylamino or by C_2-C_6alkynylcarbonyl(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino; and/or

the phenyl ring, the naphthyl ring and the 5- or 6-membered aromatic ring may be substituted by halo-substituted C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy, hydroxy-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_1-C_6alkyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_1-C_6alkoxy, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl, C_1-C_6alkylthio, C_1-C_6alkylsulfinyl, C_1-C_6alkylsulfonyl, mono-C_1-C_6alkylamino, di-C_1-C_6alkylamino, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonylamino, C_1-C_6alkylcarbonyl(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino, C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_3-C_6alkenyloxy, hydroxy-C_3-C_6alkenyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_2-C_6alkenyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_3-C_6alkenyloxy, C_2-C_6alkenylcarbonyl, C_2-C_6alkenyl-thio, C_2-C_6alkenylsulfinyl, C_2-C_6alkenylsulfonyl, mono- or di-C_2-C_6alkenylamino, C_1-C_6alkyl-(C_3-C_6alkenyl)amino, C_2-C_6alkenylcarbonylamino, C_2-C_6alkenylcarbonyl(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino, C_2-C_6alkynyl, C_3-C_6alkynyloxy, hydroxy-C_3-C_6alkynyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_3-C_6alkynyl, C_1-C_6alkoxy-C_4-C_6alkynyloxy, C_2-C_6alkynylcarbonyl, C_2-C_6alkynylthio, C_2-C_6alkynylsulfinyl, C_2-C_6alkynyl-sulfonyl, mono- or di-C_3-C_6alkynylamino, C_1-C_6alkyl(C_3-C_6alkynyl)amino, C_2-C_6alkynyl-carbonylamino or C_2-C_6alkynylcarbonyl(C_1-C_6alkyl)amino; and/or

the phenyl ring, the naphthyl ring and the 5- or 6-membered aromatic ring may be substituted by a radical of formula $COOR_{50}$, $CONR_{51}$, $SO_2NR_{53}R_{54}$ or SO_2OR_{55}, wherein R_{50}, R_{51}, R_{52}, R_{53}, R_{54} and R_{55} are each independently of the others C_1-C_6alkyl, C_2-C_6alkenyl or C_3-C_6alkynyl or halo-, hydroxy-, alkoxy-, mercapto-, amino-, cyano-, nitro-, alkylthio-, alkylsulfinyl- or alkylsulfonyl-substituted C_1-C_6alkyl, C_2-C_6alkenyl or C_3-C_6alkynyl; and n is 0, 1 or 2,

by reaction of a compound of formula II



(II),

wherein

R_0, R_1, R_2, R_3 and n are as defined and X is a leaving group, with malonic acid dinitrile in an inert diluent in the presence of a palladium catalyst and a base, which process comprises using as the base a hydroxide of an alkali metal or a mixture of hydroxides of alkali metals.

2. A process according to claim 1, wherein, in the compound of formula II, X is halogen; $R_{10}S(O)_2O$- wherein R_{10} is methyl, halomethyl, C_4F_9-(n), phenyl or phenyl substituted from one to three times by halogen, methyl or by halomethyl; or is mono-, di- or tri-arylmethoxy.

3. A process according to claim 2, wherein X is chorine, bromine, iodine, $CF_3S(O)_2O$- (triflate), $CF_3(CF_2)_3S(O)_2O$- (nonaflate), p-tolyl-$S(O)_2O$- (tosylate), $(C_6H_5)_2CHO$-, $(CH_3$-$C_6H_4)_2CHO$-, $(C_6H_5)_3CO$- (trityl) or $(CH_3$-$C_6H_4)_3CO$-.

4. A process according to claim 3, wherein X is chlorine, bromine or iodine.

5. A process according to claim 4, wherein as palladium catalyst there is used a palladium(II) dihalide, palladium(II) acetate, palladium(II) sulfate, bis(triphenylphosphine)palladium(II) dichloride, bis(tricyclopentylphosphine)palladium(II) dichloride, bis(tricyclohexylphosphine)palladium(II) dichloride, bis(dibenzylideneacetone)palladium(0) or tetrakis(triphenylphosphine)palladium(0).

6. A process according to claim 1, wherein the palladium catalyst is prepared *in situ* from palladium(II) or palladium(0) compounds by complexing with phosphine ligands.

7. A process according to claim 1, wherein the palladium catalyst is used in an amount of from 0.001 to 100 mol% based on the compound of formula II.

8. A process according to claim 1, wherein as diluent there is used an aliphatic, cyclo-aliphatic or aromatic hydrocarbon, an aliphatic halohydrocarbon, a nitrile, an ether, an alcohol, a ketone, an ester or a lactone, an N-substituted lactam, an amide, an acyclic urea, a sulfoxide or water or a mixture of those diluents.

9. A process according to claim 8, wherein as an aromatic hydrocarbon there is used an ether, an N-substitued lactam, an amide, an acyclic urea or a sulfoxide.

10. A process according to claim 9, wherein N-methylpyrrolidone is used.

11. A process according to claim 1, wherein as base there is used sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide or a mixture of sodium hydroxide and potassium hydroxide.

12. A process according to claim 11, wherein sodium hydroxide is used as the base.

13. A process according to claim 10, wherein the base is used in an equivalent amount or in an excess of from 2 to 10 equivalents in relation to malonic acid dinitrile.

14. A process according to claim 1, wherein the reaction is carried out at a temperature of from 0° to 250°C.

15. A process according to claim 1, wherein the reaction of the malonic acid dinitrile with a compound of formula II is carried out at elevated pressure.